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The Cinephilic Citation in the Essay Films by José Luis Guerin and Isaki Lacuesta

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Abstract:

This paper investigates the contemporary turn to cinephilia as object of theoretical analysis and historiographical investigation through the essay films by José Luis Guerin and Isaki Lacuesta. In particular, I focus on *Innisfree* (Guerin, 1990); *Tren de sombras* (*Train of Shadows*, Guerin, 1997); *Las variaciones Marker* (*The Marker Variations*, Lacuesta, 2008) and *La noche que no acaba* (*All the Night Long*, Lacuesta, 2010). This work recovers and re-stages “cinephilic moments” through evocation of particular films, filmmakers and stars. By looking at the formal strategies in the above essay films—especially the play with the disappearance of their original referents—I contend that the cinephilic moment generates a richly generative framework to reflect on the medium itself and its potential for cultural appropriation in the context of a renewed experimental strand in Spanish film production.

Keywords: Cinephilia, Cinephilic citation, José Luis Guerin, Isaki Lacuesta, Essay film, Asynchrony

Susan Sontag's often cited article “The Decay of Cinema,” published in the *New York Times Magazine* in 1996, lamented the symbolic death of cinema, and with it the passing of cinephilia as a culture that values film not as an industrial product, but as a poetic object. The next ten years, however, saw the rebirth of cinephilia as a shared language of love, discussion, and analysis of film—a culture that seems very much alive. To a large extent, cinephilia has always underpinned our efforts in theorising and historicising our relationship with the moving image, and expressing appreciation for its multiple manifestations. However, cinephilia as a *concept* started to be explicitly invoked once more at the turn of the millennium. Academic book-length publications, scholarly articles in leading film journals,¹ let alone the explosion of writing and viewing online in blogs and free video streaming channels have unleashed a second coming of cinephilia. Unlike the “first wave” of historical cinephilia (documented in the first two decades after the end of

World War II and located in the metropolitan hubs of Europe and America, with Paris as its symbolic centre) this second wave is transnational and lacks a clear centre. Equally important, it approaches film as one more element in a multi-media constellation of moving images (Elsaesser 40-41). With this second wave as background, in the following pages I look at the work of two contemporary filmmakers from Spain who both return to and challenge traditional notions of film-centred cinephilia. Jose Luis Guerin and Isaki Lacuesta have expanded the boundaries of cinema as an object and as an experience across different formats and viewing spaces, such as the museum, DVD, television, the internet, as well as the cinema screen (Quintana, “La autoría en el cine español” 7). It is, however, in a particular strand of their work that reflects on previous moments in film history where we can find an explicit engagement with cinephilia. On the one hand, such engagement presupposes a self-reflexive mode of “writing” about cinema using the moving image. On the other, their transnational and multi-media practice constantly refers back to the elusiveness of the original cinematic experience, which, in turn, prompts a myriad of cinephilic re-visions. This dialectic between absence and presence goes, I will argue, hand in hand with the filmmakers’ renewed interest in the essay film as an experimental practice.

Guérin’s and Lacuesta’s essay films participate of the love of cinema on the three fronts that Mark Betz defines as consubstantial to the study of contemporary cinephilia: “as *phenomenon* (cultural, historical, geo-political), as *experience* (collective, individual), and as *knowledge* (fascination, reflection, interpretation)” (132; emphasis in original). Guérin’s *Tren de sombras. Le spectre de Le Thuit* (*Train of Shadows*, 1997) is an unavoidable starting point in this discussion, as it touches on all three dimensions. *Tren de sombras* aligns itself with other films more explicitly devoted to commemorate the 1995 centenary of cinema (Montero 69) such as the omnibus *Lumière et compagnie* (*Lumière and*

Company, various directors, 1995) and contemporary avant-garde pieces about the medium such as *Decasia: The State of Decay* (Bill Morrison, 2002), or *Lyrisch nitraat* (*Lyrical Nitrate*, Peter Delpout, 1991), which foreground the decaying materiality of silent film. The latter two are re-enactments, which, as described by Michele Pierson, evoke an affective experience that arises from the communication of an “intensified sense of historical presence” through repetition and performance of past historical practices (2). This claim can likewise be extended to the reconstruction of the senescent look and feel of silent home movies carried out in *Tren de sombras*. Presenting itself as a meditation about the lost legacy of an unknown French filmmaker, Gérard Fleury, the film’s point of departure is Fleury’s anecdotal vanishing from his home in Le Thuit, Normandy on 8 November 1930. This disappearance prompts a superficially nostalgic look at the remainders of Fleury’s amateur family films, and a return to the empty spaces of his country house, presently vacated of its ebullient former life. *Tren de sombras* unfolds as a game of mirrors around absences and ghosts. Under the disguise of a documentary on bourgeois life in the early decades of the twentieth century, the film finally reveals itself as a fiction constructed on faux found footage and focused on the very temporality of the medium. Luring the spectator into decoding the fragmented images as subjective psychodrama, Guérin’s exercise in cinephilic reconstruction (and its deconstruction) actively interrogates the viewer’s relationship with the film image in affective but also historically situated terms. The film’s play with the visual textures of damaged celluloid, its emphasis on the sound of the running projector, and its use of vertical editing enable both a retrospective look at film history—borrowing from Pierson, it offers “an *experience* of another time” (2, emphasis in the original)—and an interactive narrative akin to the modes of viewing associated with digital media databases (Kinder 21). *Tren de sombras*’s primary cinephilic investment lies

in the spectral historicity² of the disappearing medium itself, as well as the potential histori(es) it contains. With this idea in mind, the rest of this article addresses the third facet of the cinephilic prism described above: what kind of knowledge(s) does this form of textual cinephilia generate, and how does the essayistic film form shape it?

As noted, *Tren de sombras* synchronically fits within an international avant-garde that engages with the materiality of film as historical practice. From a diachronic, national perspective, however, Guerin's film breaks new ground on a mode of filmmaking with little continuous tradition in Spanish cinema: the essay film.³ The essay film has been called an "elusive genre" and a "liminal category" (Arthur 59) that blurs the boundaries between the documentary, the avant-garde experiment and auteur cinema.⁴ Oscillating between the personal and the factual, the essay film proposes a combination of reflectiveness and subjectivity (Rascaroli 22) that makes it a much more open form than the documentary, and a very different viewing experience. The essay film presupposes a strong enunciative voice, and an active, engaged spectator willing to interact with the text (Rascaroli 32-37). Orson Welles's direct address to the spectator in *F for Fake* (1973), another refractive essay film that obliquely engages with cinematic practice (Corrigan 182), is regularly cited as a supreme example of enunciative "omnipotence" (Blüminger 53; Català Domènech 80). However, the essay film's enunciator is not necessarily bodied forth by a voiceover or a stand-in analogous to the literary essay's author, as *Tren de sombras*'s reflection about the filmic image through the image suggests.

Through the essay film we can draw a historical line that goes from the directors associated with post-World War II cinephilia—most notably, Jonas Mekas, Jean-Luc Godard and especially Chris Marker (Blüminger 50)—to contemporary experimental practice.⁵ Both Guerin and Lacuesta are associated with a new Catalan avant-garde and the

institutional framework provided by the University Pompeu Fabra's Master's Programme in Creative Documentary (from which Lacuesta was one of the first graduates to emerge, under the mentorship of Joaquim Jordà). In suggesting a common thread between and across their work I echo the critical consensus that has begun to form around a group of leftfield filmmakers broadly aligned with experimental and non-fiction formats,⁶ and linked (though not exclusively) to Barcelona as an institutional and creative hub (Quintana, "Un cineasta del siglo XXI" 21; De Felipe Martínez and Martín Núñez 52). Notwithstanding differences in affiliation—Guerin's sensibility is in many ways closer to Víctor Erice than to the younger generation of experimental filmmakers (Monterde 113), which includes Lacuesta—a sense of commonality arises from a shared language of cinephilia (I will return to this point in my discussion of the films). However, it needs to be emphasised that the essay films by Guerin and Lacuesta distinctively resist readings through a mono-cultural prism (be it Spanish or Catalan) despite the support they receive from cultural institutions. Indeed, as Steven Marsh has argued in relation to their participation in the project *Todas las cartas. Correspondencias fílmicas*, their cosmopolitan practice produces "a disturbance within the national sign" (25). Such weakening of the national only highlights the potential of cinephilia to provide an alternative roadmap to their practice. They are travellers as well as experimenters, globe-trotting filmmakers engaged in cross-cultural dialogues and journeys.

This peripatetic practice is a key feature in most of Guerin's films since *Innisfree* (1990), a journey to the Irish locations where John Ford's *The Quiet Man* (1952) was shot. In the 2000s Isaki Lacuesta continued to expand the tradition of the cinephilic essay film. In particular, his short film *Las variaciones Marker* (*The Marker Variations*, 2007) and the feature-length documentary for television *La noche que no acaba* (2010), a portrait of Ava

Gardner's years in Spain are,⁷ like *Innisfree*, found-footage experiments prompted by an explicit cinephilia. Dislocated from its original context, the film fragment takes on a key role in these films, which directly engage with the cinematic past (represented by Chris Marker and classical Hollywood cinema) through a practice of appropriation as textual citation. Combining this with the enunciative markers typical of the essayistic film form (subjective voiceover, use of dialectic montage) the films foreground the *asynchronous* nature of the cinephilic citation, revealing (and revelling in) its vanishing points. As we will see, these rhetorical strategies interrogate the viewer's desire for the cinematic image in affective but also in culturally situated terms.

The cinephilic citation as memory trope: asynchrony versus nostalgia

Modern Spanish cinema has found in cinephilia an apposite tool for memory work. Chris Darke identifies the “epiphanic moment” as a figure of spectatorship in its most canonical text, *El espíritu de la colmena* (*The Spirit of the Beehive*, Víctor Erice, 1973). Here cinephilia works as the link in the encoded relationship between childhood, trauma and history, allowing for a displaced reading of a dark political past into an allegory of orphanhood and alternative filiation. As Darke notes, Ana's overwhelming encounter with cinema blends the experience of the fictional character in 1940s Spain, that of six-year old newcomer Ana Torrent, who watches *Frankenstein* (James Whale, 1931) for the first time in the course of shooting the film and, retrospectively, Erice's memory of his own discovery of cinema as a child (the object of his later autobiographical video essay *La morte rouge*, 2006) in the “hunger years” of the immediate post-Civil War period. The fictional child Ana, like Erice himself, becomes “one of the symbolic orphans that cinema ‘adopted’” (158). In *The Spirit of the Beehive*—the peak example of 1970s metaphorical

cinema—the cinephilic moment simultaneously articulates social and national allegory, and an allegory “of the aftereffects of cinephilic spectatorship” (156) in times of scarcity.

This narrative has had subsequent iterations in the Spanish popular cinema that has emerged since the 1990s. The celebration of cinema’s practices, iconography and histories in films including *La niña de mis ojos* (*The Girl of my Dreams*, Fernando Trueba, 1998); *El embrujo de Shanghai* (*The Shanghai Spell*, Trueba, 2002); *Torremolinos 73* (Pablo Berger, 2003); or *Los años desnudos* (*Rated R*, Dunia Ayaso and Félix Sabroso, 2008) re-enacts similar cinephilic moments as a trope of collective memory. These films use the love of cinema as a counterpoint to the (reconstructed) experience of everyday life in Spain under Francisco Franco’s dictatorship, thus indirectly consigning the political past to the spectacle of period reconstruction. Embedded in the nostalgic impulse of contemporary audiovisual culture,⁸ the popular retro film promotes cinephilia through belief in the film image as instrument for *recovery*: moments of plenitude that restore the illusion of synchronicity between the lived past and the (often utopian) mirror held by the cinema screen even if the plots stress the separation between both worlds, the real and the desired, in melodramatic or comedic form.⁹ In these genre films cinephilia becomes the cornerstone for the recreation of entire worlds: an all-encompassing image of the past that reacts to a cultural history plagued by a sense of isolation and time lag. Such images of plenitude, paradoxically, threaten to obscure *our* (the contemporary spectator’s) relationship with a conflictive national history. Restored synchronicity lies at the heart of the pleasures promised by the loving reconstruction of neglected and unloved popular film cultures.

Cinephilia can, however, convey a sense of historicity through its opposite: by pointing at gaps in interpretation that emerge from silences and omissions—by signalling disappearances. Christian Keathley discusses cinephilia in relation to the fetishization of

fragments of a film, either individual shots or marginal details (that is, details not designed to be memorable) in the image. This encounter with “fleeting, evanescent moments” in the film experience (Willemen, qtd. in Keathley 7) is typically unpredictable and elusive; the product of the spectator’s “panoramic perception” (41), that is, a gaze that is susceptible to the peripheral, seemingly unimportant detail. Keathley calls this (after Paul Willemen) *cinephiliac* moments. The cinephiliac moment is the kind of “*mise-en-abyme* wherein each cinephile’s obsessive relationship to the cinema is embodied in its most dense, concentrated form” and, (32) as such, a moment of semantic excess that resists interpretation (9). The denomination “cinephiliac” also alludes, however, to the preservation and transmission of such moments as part of the material practices of watching and writing about film. They are constitutive of a *history of cinephilia*, which, in turn, needs to be reconstructed—this is the project that structures Keathley’s book.

The conjunction between cinephilic (or, cinephiliac) moments and historiographical practice starts taking shape in Guerin’s early work.¹⁰ His 1984 short film *Souvenir* starts with a card in the style of silent cinema. The intertitle reads: “Blancas nubecillas pasaban tras Notre-Dame en un viejo film de Jean Renoir. Y yo me digo, así es que esas nubecillas cruzaron por ahí hace más de 50 años.”¹¹ This (whimsically) written recollection cuts to a *visual* “souvenir”: a home movie made up of selected fragments of what would appear to be three young people enjoying a holiday: views from the lift of the Eiffel Tower; games on the beach; a young woman climbing onto a statue and assuming playful positions. These images lack direct sound and are instead edited to Françoise Hardy’s 1962 pop hit “Tous les garçons et les filles.” Sonically and visually, *Souvenir* refers to a historical cinephilic epicentre: France in the 1960s. The freshness of these images—in which we see the director himself, as a character and as a reflection on a glass pane—remind the viewer of their

condition as memory objects; fragmentary souvenirs. A reported moment from a Renoir film can be as vivid as a “lived” moment; the lived moment (captured, and therefore reified by film) is already a souvenir. The arc of the film goes from grasping time as spontaneous movement (the surf on the beach) to the “monumentalising” of time (the statue)—two opposed images that merge in a superimposition in the final seconds of the film (fig. 1). *Souvenir* closes, as it starts, with the sound of the film running through the projector, as the strip of celluloid becomes visible. Scratches and lines suddenly criss-cross the screen over the intertitle “in an old film” (fig. 2). Anticipating the more elaborated metafilmic discourse of *Tren de sombras*, *Souvenir* likewise muses about the fragility of the medium, and thus of memory itself, in distinctively cinephilic terms.

[Figure #1]

Fig. #1. *Souvenir*. Courtesy of José Luis Guerin

[Figure #2]

Fig. #2. *Souvenir*. Courtesy of José Luis Guerin

The written thought that frames *Souvenir* (“blancas nubecillas pasaban tras Notre-Dame en un viejo film de Jean Renoir...”) is not interpretative, but affective. It recalls Georges Méliès’s marvelled reaction upon watching the Lumière film *Le Repas de bébé* in 1895. Rather than the exhibition of a quotidian scene of family life (a sub-genre reconstructed with archaeological exactitude in the home movies that occupy the first part of *Tren de sombras*), what enchanted Méliès was the wind in the trees, the leaves gently rustling in the background of the frame (Vaughan qtd. in Keathley 59). A formative cinephilic moment that stems from the “combination of motion plus the contingent detail”

(58), such detail was not choreographed to be *looked at*, but *revealed* through the spectator's panoramic perception. Reflecting on cinema as a medium that embalms time, Guerin's *Souvenir* channels the thought of André Bazin, one of the spiritual fathers of cinephilia. In 1958, Bazin famously divided cinema of the late silent and early sound periods into two opposing trends: "those filmmakers who put their faith in the image and those who put their faith in reality" or (88), in other words, those who believed in the cut, and those who believed in the shot. One decade later Film Studies turned its back on Bazin, and on cinephilia: the 1970s were dominated by the battles around ideology; cinema was refashioned from window to the world into a rigid *dispositif* (apparatus) where reality was but the product of a regimented management of time and subjectivity—two elements which, in turn, were freed by the modernist essay film. The second wave of cinephilia has allowed, among other things, a return to Bazin and his pioneering attention to mise-en-scène as the bridge between the shot and the cut, reality and the image. Looking at the key role of editing in visual style, it would be easy and convenient to divide the works by Guerin and Lacuesta between the films that put their faith in reality—via the long takes in *En construcción* (*Work in Progress*, Guerin, 2001); *En la ciudad de Sylvia* (*In the City of Sylvia*, Guerin, 2007), *La leyenda del tiempo* (*The Legend of Time*, Lacuesta, 2006), *Los condenados* (*The Condemned*, Lacuesta, 2009)—and those that put their faith in the image, in montage: *Tren de sombras*, *Unas fotos en la ciudad de Sylvia* (*Some Pictures in the City of Sylvia*, Guerin, 2007), *Cravan vs Cravan* (Lacuesta 2002), *Las variaciones Marker*, *La noche que no acaba*. But this would hide the rich hybridity of the second wave of cinephilia. Guerin has described his own conception of cinema as a tension between control and chance, or, as he puts it by bringing together two seemingly antithetical terms "film as *dispositif* for revelation" (See Guerin in interview in García Roure). The combination of

subjectivity and reflection that defines both filmmakers' essayistic film practice displays a form of panoramic perception, but one that puts quotation marks around the cinephilic moment.

Innisfree journeys to Cong, the Irish village where John Ford shot *The Quiet Man* (1952) in search of traces of the past in present locations, photographs, faces, and especially through the voices of the local people. Editing articulates *our* desire for the correspondence between present and past, almost magically encapsulated in the use of dissolves and matches-on-action to connect different temporal frames. John Wayne/Sean Thornton throws his bowler hat high and far into the air; this is followed by a cut to a shot of the hat landing onto the ground, wherefrom is picked up by the hand of a child in the present tense of the film. However, for most of the film's duration *The Quiet Man* is a ghost text—an absent ur-text reduced to a haunting soundtrack—while the shot draws our attention to the imagined nature of such correspondence through re-enactments using the local people of Cong. The film pays particular attention to the story of a local young woman who, after having migrated to the United States in search of work, returns to the town, where she ends up working in the only business that seems to be booming: tourist outlets dedicated to *The Quiet Man*. In one particular scene, the young woman steps into the role of Maureen O'Hara/Mary Kate Danaher. Her hair is red like O'Hara's. Dressed like the character in *The Quiet Man*, she rides her bicycle across some of the locations mapped by Ford's film. One particular shot, ostensibly filmed using back projection, makes her figure stand out as a cut-out silhouette against the juxtaposed background (fig. 3).

[Figure #3]

Fig. #3. *Innisfree*. Courtesy of José Luis Guerin

The textures of back projection momentarily disrupt the aesthetic of real locations that dominates *Innisfree*, going against the grain of its documentary realism. Laura Mulvey has highlighted that the use of back projection in classic Hollywood studio films fascinates because of, and not in spite of, its obviousness—what she calls “a clumsy sublime” (“A Clumsy Sublime” 3). This technique has now become visible due to its very obsolescence. Back projection represents a form of montage internal to the shot; it makes two dissimilar times co-exist in a single image, detaching figure from background. Back projection signals a “paradoxical, impossible space” that “allows the audience to see the dream space of the cinema” while rendering “the dream uncertain” (3) but it also marks a historical viewing experience and mode of production associated to Hollywood studio cinema. The irruption of back projection in the documentary spaces of *Innisfree* highlights the cinephilic moment *turned into a quotation*. As such, it is asynchronous, that is, temporally incongruous, arising from the mismatch of two moments in time. This lack of synchronicity subtly alludes to the dislocation experienced by the character, caught in the economy of touristic re-enactments that has become part and parcel of the identity of the place and its inhabitants. Through the refractive strategies of the essay film *Innisfree* reveals the persistence of cinema as a form of colonization (Monterde 124).

An element extraneous to the body of the film, the cinephilic citation introduces a potential uncertainty. In the above mentioned *F for Fake* Welles, in the guise of a magician, playfully exploits this potential to the full, presenting the spectator with the paradox of cinema’s resemblance to a magic trick in its conjuring up of fictions out of the building blocks of documented reality. Guerin’s *En la ciudad de Sylvia* unfolds under this paradox. An experimental fiction shot entirely on location in Strasbourg, the film stresses the vivid

presentness of the city over the spectral image of *la belle inconnue* through its elaborate soundtrack and aesthetics of long takes (Losilla and Pena). The film dispenses with direct citations to other films; if anything, *En la ciudad de Sylvia* presents yet another variation on the Orpheus myth that only indirectly borrows from Alfred Hitchcock's *Vertigo* (1958) and Marker's *La Jetée* (1962). And yet, *En la ciudad de Sylvia* presents the viewer with a pure moment of dislocation, resulting from the friction between heterogeneous textures. In a key scene on board of one of the city's tramways the male artist finally speaks to the woman he has been silently pursuing for much of the film. However, she refuses to be cast into the character of Sylvie, the woman from his past. She is emphatically *not* Sylvie, and unlike Madeleine/Judy in *Vertigo*, she shudders at the idea of being stalked. It is a feminine ideal, rather than an actual woman, that the artist has been relentlessly chasing through Strasbourg. This moment of revelation is filmed through a series of static medium shots and shot/reverse shots, in which the two figures stand out in sharp focus against the moving background of the city, reduced to a blur of images that roll over through the glass windows of the tram. At this moment of utter confusion for the main character, the shot composition *imitates* back projection, creating a spatial disconnection between figures and background (fig. 4). Rob Stone reads this scene similarly: the oblong window of the tram evokes the cinema screen, suggesting "the opposite of the Kuleshov effect ... that although they share the cinematic space ... there is no connection between them" (180). Feeling disoriented and distressed, the artist realises that his itinerary around the city was meaningless. What we have witnessed is itinerary as iteration: a repetition of a mythical journey mapped many times before in Western culture and in Western cinema. As the illusion shatters, the film's impression of movement as pure trick—the stuff of cinematic illusion—is enhanced.

[Figure #4]

Fig. #4. *In the City of Sylvia*. Courtesy of José Luis Guerin

Among the works “that put their faith in reality,” *En la ciudad de Sylvia* particularly speaks to the drastic transformation of the concept of the archival image in the essay film. Josep Maria Català and Josetxo Cerdán have noted that the essay film treats *all* the images as if they were archival images. Found footage sheds its connection with the historically contingent associated with (and problematized by) the documentary form. Instead, indexical transparency becomes its aesthetic function (19-22). This discursive reflection on the status of the archival image—and thus the cinephilic quotation—is relevant to approach *En la ciudad de Sylvia*, in which the tram sequence can be said to cite the scenes set in a city tram that circulates amidst the sprawling urban sets in F.W. Murnau’s *Sunrise* (1927).¹² Although *En la ciudad de Sylvia*’ can be read as a documentary on the spaces of Strasbourg, the film functions—Deleuzian terms inevitably come to mind— as a richly layered time-image (Stone 176), in which the male seer’s spatial trajectory is internal to his subjective experience of time, as well as the iterations of (film) historical time. Ultimately, *En la ciudad de Sylvia* retreats into a modernist cinephilic imaginary, but this move is brought sharply into focus through the temporal disjunctions arising between background and figure. Asynchrony in the cinephilic essay film therefore disrupts the mere repetitions of nostalgia.

Figure and background: re-contextualising the cinephilic citation

So far we have seen that, as an *effect* in the film, the cinephilic citation introduces an element of non-synchronicity in the body of the film, de-naturalising the relationship

between background and figure. The pure cinephilic moment resists interpretation but, as a citation, enables transcultural and historically displaced readings. The first part of Lacuesta's *La leyenda del tiempo* (entitled "La voz de Isra"/"The voice of Isra," which refers to its main character, a young gypsy boy from San Fernando in Cádiz) is of clear Bazinian lineage, creating a fictional space for the discussion of identity with the tools of documentary. The second part of the film ("La voz de Makiko"/"The voice of Makiko") presents a different, more plot-driven variation on the same theme.¹³ In it, Makiko, a Japanese nurse, travels to San Fernando to learn to sing like her admired Camarón de la Isla. Camarón's traces create a bridge between the two parts of this diptych. The famous flamenco singer is a true spectral presence that haunts the radically different identity performances enacted by Isra and Makiko (Nair 144-7). In particular, Makiko's inquisitive gaze and her outsider position in the community have the effect of putting cultural authenticity (vividly conveyed in the first part of the film) in quotation marks. For example, Makiko's acculturation through her love of flamenco needs to pass the test of paid labour as a waitress in a Chinese restaurant, a fake décor within an authentic location, which promises to erase her difference. As she candidly notes (in Japanese in the original voiceover): "I never thought that, in order to become Spanish, first I had to become Chinese."

Although Makiko, a non-professional actor, exists in the real world (the film, shot without a conventional script, grows around her story as well as Isra's [de Lucas and Lacuesta, no page]), her gaze and embodied presence introduce a cinephilic citation made retroactively explicit in the later *Las variaciones Marker*. This 34-minute essay film was made by Lacuesta in collaboration with editor Sergi Dies (who also lends his voice to the voiceover track). Included in a curated DVD box-set devoted to Marker published by

Spanish label Intermedio, *Las variaciones Marker* is divided into seven chapters,¹⁴ or “variations” on a designated theme—Chris Marker. In one of the chapters in this essayistic tour-de-force, “El misterio Makiko” (“The Makiko Mystery”), Lacuesta intercuts the image and voice of his actress, Makiko Matsumura, with those of Koumiko, the central character in Marker’s *Le Mystère Koumiko* (*The Koumiko Mystery*, 1965). Lacuesta borrows from Marker’s film through literal citations, inserting segments from Marker’s work into his own. Textually replicating the intercultural dialogue between Marker and his actor/character Koumiko, Lacuesta also poses Marker’s questions to Makiko. Her responses are heard in voiceover in combination with excerpts from the original soundtrack of Marker’s film. Makiko’s face is also intercut with shots of Marker’s original Japanese interlocutor (figs. 5-6). Rather than simply pastiching Marker’s style, Lacuesta lays his film over fragments of *Le Mystère Koumiko*. The co-existence of the original and the “remake” in the image track and the soundtrack of the new film articulates the historical difference between both—and enhances the asynchrony of the cinephilic quotation. Taken by Lacuesta to watch *Le Mystère Koumiko*, Makiko is baffled by the exoticism of the Japan and of the Japanese femininity presented in Marker’s film, a reaction reported by the director in voiceover. As a new immigrant to Spain confronted with the challenge of communication, Makiko candidly responds to Marker’s/Lacuesta’s questions in accented, near-broken Spanish, but laughs aloud at the strange dialogue that the director attempts to re-create. *Las variaciones Marker* not only expresses Lacuesta’s love for the cinema of Marker through citation, but also de-centres the “original” through new cross-cultural dialogues and variations, an aspect to which I will return in the last part of this article.

[Figure #5]

Fig. #5. *Las variaciones Marker*. Courtesy of Intermedio

[Figure #6]

Fig. #6. *Las variaciones Marker*. Courtesy of Intermedio

This love for Marker, apparent across Lacuesta's body of work, may work as a mode of affiliation on the part of the younger filmmaker, but holds no simple claims for influence. In his original discussion of the cinephiliac moment, Willemsen touches on the way cinephilia is designated in cinema through a form of double-coding. The cinephiliac moment becomes quotation, homage, or intertextual reference not only when reconstructed, but also when signalled through commentary. When cinephilia is thus designated in cinema, it activates complicity (241). This complicity is part and parcel of the mode of address of the essay film, in which an individual (rather than social) enunciator in the first person—an "I"—implicates an addressee—a "You"—, a situated spectator. This rhetorical strategy makes the essay film dialogic in nature, as the viewer is invited to think alongside the problems and questions that it opens up (Rascaroli 33-34).

Such double-coding of the cinephilic moment plays a key part in the potential of Marker, as a non-traditional cinephilic object, to generate new forms of writing. Through the extended use of voiceover, *Las variaciones Marker* remains structurally faithful to the move towards criticism through montage that characterises Marker's films. Bazin's often cited assertion with regard to Marker's *Lettre de Sibérie* (*Letter from Siberia*, 1957) still applies: montage is forged from the audio element to the visual, from ear to eye (2003: 44). Like its model, *Las variaciones Marker* also conducts a dispersal of authorship by turning Marker (but also Lacuesta) into a spectral presence in the text, enhanced by the multiplicity of borrowings and masks that he adopts. The chapter/essay "Las cámaras prohibidas" ("The

Forbidden Cameras”) is densely layered with visual and aural quotations from Marker’s well-known *Sans Soleil* (*Sunless*, 1982), in itself a rich found-footage experiment. Lacuesta places quotations from *Sans Soleil* alongside segments from other filmmakers’s works, including Sergei Eisenstein, Agnès Varda, Alain Berliner, Sofia Coppola, or Alfred Hitchcock (figs. 7-8). This exercise in vertical montage visualises the processes of selection and combination of frames, rearranging them into syntactic units of meaning according to similarity—a new instance of the principle of database narrative deployed by Guerin in *Tren de sombras* (Kinder 17, 21). The visual as well as sonic re-combination of citations (Lacuesta/Dies’s voiceover is interspersed with fragments of the French-language voiceover by Florence Delay reading from the letters by travelling cameraman Sandor Krasna in *Sans Soleil*) undermines the idea of the original cinephilic moment (and the linear genealogy of authorship), which cannot be located in any single shot or frame signed by Marker. Instead, the different principles of visual and sonic montage at work in “Las cámaras prohibidas” highlight the vanishing points in a larger structure made of a multiplicity of fragments/citations—a multiplicity of “Markers”—and no original representations since, as noted by the voiceover narrator, in the gatherings of this secret sect, the Markers, “las cámaras están severamente prohibidas.”¹⁵ This playfulness is much more than just routine postmodern deconstruction of authorship—it inoculates cinephilia against nostalgia and the monumentalising effects of time (evoked in the statuary images in *Souvenir*).

[Figure #7]

Fig #7. “Aquí tenemos un plano de Chris Marker, firmado por Johan van der Keuken”/ “Here we have a shot by Chris Marker, signed by Johan van der Keuken” (from the voiceover of *Las variaciones Marker*. My translation).

Las variaciones Marker. Courtesy of Intermedio

[Figure #8]

Fig. #8. “Un Chris Marker de Alfred Hitchcock—en este caso un ‘premake’”/ “A Chris Marker by Alfred Hitchcock—this time, a ‘premake’” (from the voiceover of *Las variaciones Marker*. My translation).
Las variaciones Marker. Courtesy of Intermedio

As Steven Marsh notes, *Las variaciones Marker* comments “on the international dissemination of Marker’s signature, its wordly character” (34). Further to this spatial dimension, and borrowing Sarah Cooper’s thoughts on *Sans Soleil*, I would like to suggest that *Las variaciones Marker* equally “reflects back to past moments, [but] it is also future-directed in its attempt to escape time altogether” (124). In a short article published in tribute to Marker’s memory in May 2012, Lacuesta echoes this: “El tiempo es, para Chris Marker, [la] espiral de variaciones infinitas en la que se confunden ecos y presentimientos” (20).¹⁶ This principle also applies to *Las variaciones Marker*, which boldly re-enacts the cinephilic moment as a performative device made possible by the hypertextual logic of filmmaking in the digital era. Echoes become premonitions; the future of film is already in its past, and the cinephilic citation is valued for its ability to generate unlimited variations. In another chapter in the film, “The Fresh Widows’ Variations” (original title in English), the narrator “demonstrates” that it is possible to make infinite Markers with the impersonal assistance of computer software in the random editing of images. However, place produces perspective; the voiceover ultimately reminds us that the found images, the pieces of the puzzle, will vary depending on *where* they are found.

This takes me back to the potential of the cinephilic citation for a cross-cultural film historiography, and to *La noche que no acaba*—Lacuesta's most obviously cinephilic essay film yet; one rather more driven by the possibilities of the form than by the fascination exerted by its "lost" object. A piece commissioned by the television channel Turner Classic Movies, *La noche que no acaba* is, on the surface, a portrait of Hollywood star Ava Gardner displaying the familiar storytelling typical of the nostalgia documentary devoted to Hollywood's golden era. Freely inspired by a biography of Gardner's "Spanish years",¹⁷ the film covers the well-documented period from the mid-fifties to the late sixties in which Gardner worked in US runaway productions shot in Italy and Spain, where she eventually found a temporary home.

The opening minutes of the film introduce a dazzling array of formal devices. These include a slowed-down montage of close-ups of Gardner (stressing her well-rehearsed back-to-front turn of the head, which allows her face to dramatically reveal itself to the camera); impossible eye-line matches between shots of Gardner at different stages in her career; spectral superimpositions, and micro-repetitions through looping and reversal of frames. By isolating and amplifying the star's gestures, the film deconstructs her aura. This manipulation, reminiscent of the films of Martin Arnold (*Pièce Touchée*, 1989) and Matthias Müller (*Home Stories*, 1990) places *La noche que no acaba* in the tradition of the experimental filmmaking that explores (and exploits) the avant-garde's "ambivalent and unequal relationship with Hollywood" (Wees 5), but hardly disturbs the expectations raised by the television star biography, in line with Lacuesta and co-writer Isa Campo's goal to make the film accessible and informative throughout (González, no page). Nevertheless, by slowing and manipulating the archival image, the film deconstructs the typical gestures of cinephilia critically.

“Slowing” or “delaying cinema” has been identified by Mulvey as a practice shared by the “possessive”, fetishistic spectator of Hollywood cinema (who seeks to apprehend the aura of the star through consumption of stills, memorabilia, tribute documentaries, as well as the films themselves), the practice of textual analysis, and the counter-cinema of the avant-garde. Fixating on a moment or sequence and extracting it from its narrative context leaves us exposed to the “unexpected encounter” with the time of the pro-filmic event: the “the time of the camera, embalmed time, which comes to the surface, shifting from the narrative ‘now’ to ‘then’” (*Death 24x a Second* 173). A perfect filmic transposition of the critical practice proposed by Mulvey, *La noche que no acaba* strives to give visibility to the pro-filmic events in the margins of the cinematic text—what the dual voiceover (performed by the veteran Spanish star Charo López, and the younger Ariadna Gil in a split that replicates the uncanny co-existence of the young and the mature Ava in the film) calls the second story told by every film, “la historia de los cuerpos filmados” or,¹⁸ embalmed time, *death itself* (*Death 24x a Second* 173). The shot/reverse shot that sets up an incongruous, poignant dialogue between the young Gardner, freshly arrived in the Catalan village Tossa de Mar for the shoot of *Pandora and the Flying Dutchman* (Albert Lewin, 1951), and the declining star of the television super-production *Harem* (William Hale, 1986) vividly points at the time elapsed between those two moments, those two performances (figs. 9-10).

[Figure #9]

Fig. #9. *La noche que no acaba*. Courtesy of Turner Broadcasting System España. S.L.

[Figure #10]

Fig. #10. *La noche que no acaba*. Courtesy of Turner Broadcasting System España. S.L.

Like Guerin's *Innisfree*, under the promise of nostalgia for classic Hollywood *La noche que no acaba* dwells on an absence at its centre. This absence prompts the camera's panoramic gaze to turn to the human and social details in the background—a rhetorical move repeated, in different ways, across a body of work focused on elusive or haunting “ghostly” figures: Camarón de la Isla in *La leyenda del tiempo*; Joan Pujol ‘Garbo’ in *Garbo. El espía que salvó al mundo* (*Garbo: The Spy*, 2009) directed by Edmon Roch and co-written with Lacuesta; Arthur Cravan and his multiple incarnations in *Cravan vs Cravan*; the missing body of Ezequiel in *Los condenados*; François Augières in *Los pasos dobles* (*The Double Steps*, 2011), and even the elusive Marker himself in *Las variaciones Marker*. On this occasion, as the central character merges with its myth, the background comes forcefully to the fore. *La noche que no acaba* specifically addresses the “fetishistic investment in the extraction of a fragment of cinema from its context” (a commonplace practice in the nostalgia star portrait) and “a cinephilia that extracts and then replaces a fragment with extra understanding back into its context” (Mulvey, *Death 24x a Second* 144). *La noche que no acaba*'s panoramic perception scrutinises (sometimes literally) footage from the films starring Gardner set and/or shot in Spain in search of other characters, other portraits: those who, in Madrid and in Tossa de Mar, befriended, hosted, cared for, worked for, photographed, body-doubled for Gardner, or even lay down for a siesta with the famous star. Like Agnès Varda's documentary *Les Demoiselles ont eu 25 ans* (*The Young Girls Turn 25*, 1993), *La noche que no acaba* restores the social context to the cinephilic myth.

This panoramic perception takes the cinephilic work one step further, isolating the details that reveal the background in the films of Gardner—Ava's Spain—as incongruous citations. Backgrounds come into focus as a series of masquerades; the outcome of a double manoeuvre of veiling /unveiling Spain as setting and décor. For example, the Andalusian

culture of flamenco and bullfighters recreated in Tossa de Mar is laid over the unseen poverty in what is called in the voiceover “probablemente el pueblo menos flamenco de Catalunya.”¹⁹ Lacuesta’s film aptly reads this scenario through the central conceit in the classic comedy *¡Bienvenido, Mr Marshall!* (*Welcome, Mr Marshall*, Luis García Berlanga, 1953), another story of a town putting on such clichéd trappings of “Spanishness” in the hope of attracting American capital. Further to this, the camera scrutinises long shots of crowds in Samuel Bronston’s super-production *55 Days in Peking* (Nicholas Ray, 1963), revelling in the little details (such as the un-Chinese faces of the extras) that reveal the cracks in the illusion (Madrid posing as Peking). Conversely, the construction of Gardner’s fantasy of “Spanishness” is held together by the star’s slipping into the role of the new Carmen, which naturalises the fictitious Spanish settings in the Hollywood European productions *The Barefoot Contessa* (Joseph L. Mankiewicz, 1954), *The Naked Maja* (Henry Koster, 1958) and *The Angel Wore Red* (Nunnally Johnson, 1960), all shot at Cinecittá in Rome, and in other Italian locations.

La noche que no acaba subtly connects the mythification of Gardner to the disappearance of Spain’s fraught political landscape. Lacuesta’s reframing of the cinephilic citation attests to such disappearance by stressing the asynchrony between the figure and the background, and pointing the spectator’s gaze to seemingly unimportant details. *La noche que no acaba* led me to *Pandora and the Flying Dutchman*, which I first saw in a screening of the restored digital print in 2010. In the course of the opening scenes that set up the tragic ending of Pandora against the background of the Spanish port town “Esperanza” (the fictional name given to Tossa de Mar), I was distracted by the sight of a marginal figure: a silent member of the Civil Guard, who appears awkwardly positioned on the left edge of the frame throughout the scene where the unseen dead bodies of Pandora

Reynolds and her lover Hendrik (James Mason) lie on the beach, wrapped up in fishermen's nets, much to the shock of Geoffrey Fielding (Harold Warrender) and Pandora's suitor Stephen Cameron (Nigel Patrick). The Civil Guard's off-centre presence unbalances the shot and is not relevant to the narrative flow of the sequence. However, if we still the film, this figure dominates the frame, functioning as a static, silent reminder of the state authority under Franco's rule, still non-existent at the time the film is set (the early 1930s) but very much in force at the time of shooting (the early 1950s). Lacuesta's cinephilic re-viewing of *Pandora and the Flying Dutchman* makes such peripheral details *readable*, uncovering the mark of embalmed time that shifts the narrative from "now" to "then"—the background invading the space vacated by an absent figure. Or, as Mulvey notes, the cinephilic impulse that isolates a fragment from the whole can also restore it back to its place with extra understanding of its original context.

Conclusion: cinema history in the present tense

The cinephilic citation does not need to reiterate the ineffable qualities of cinema. As a textual effect, it de-naturalises the relationship between background and figure within the shot, as well as between shots, bringing to the fore gaps and leaps in their temporal relations. The pure cinephilic moment resists narrative interpretation but, as a citation, it may enable transcultural and historically displaced readings in the films under consideration. Guerin's and Lacuesta's essay films invite cross-cultural, historically situated exercises in reading and writing about cinema through the medium of film (and, especially, digital video) itself. In the context of both a map of international connections through the essay film and diachronic excavations of "lost" moments in Spanish film history, their practice has tantalising implications for an alternative historiography of the

cinema made in Spain. Linking cinema's "machine of modernity" to the vagaries of memory, Keathley notes that cinephiliac moments "mark the *mise-en-abyme* of history itself, for cinephiliac moments are both the point of history's disappearance and the point of its potential recovery" (113). Fleury, the unknown filmmaker in *Tren de sombras* may uncannily pre-figure other "vanished" directors and truncated careers with roots in amateur filmmaking—Llorenç Llobet-Gràcia and Iván Zulueta, in particular. Disappearance and cosmopolitanism have also been the basis for the articulation of an avant-garde cinema in Barcelona (see Galt on the *Escuela de Barcelona*, 2007), a tradition arguably resurrected through the rebirth of independent cinema practice in Catalonia across a variety of modes of production and representation, including the documentary and the essay film.

Beyond speculations about national belonging, if there is a thread that structures a geopolitics of identity in the work of these cinephilic filmmakers is one that presupposes the filmmaker to be always a temporary guest in alien cultural histories, to cite the title of Guerin's digital documentary *Guest* (2010). In this travelogue across film festivals the filmmaker is a spectator endowed with a panoramic perception who looks at/from the margins of the screen and reads it from a non-hegemonic position across cultures, and across cultures of cinema (Kinder 13-14; 18). The preference for "variations" on a theme, for chance encounters within the controlled space of the frame, and for the multiple films potentially contained within a film has been repeatedly cited by both filmmakers in interviews (for example, García Roure, and Gil and Masotta). This article has looked at the essay film as a supple tool to explore these formal aspects, and through them the persistence of cinema history in the present tense. Thus these essay films reconfigure spaces of national film culture as traversed by international influences. Guerin's and

Lacuesta's different visions of cinema remind us that every citation (the mark and the strategy of the cinephile) is also the beginning of a new dialogue.

Cinephilia may be too broad a label, and at the same time too small a box for these and other experimental filmmakers who work with and through cinephilic quotations. The filmmaking group Los Hijos has turned its attention to a rather more canonical sample of "moments" in Spanish cinema in their short essay film *Ya viene, aguanta, riégue me, mátame* (2009). Fernando Franco's *Les Variations Dielman* (*The Dielman Variations*, 2010) conducts an essay on space and time in Chantal Akerman's *Jeanne Dielman, 23 quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles* (1975). New viewing conditions and platforms (such as Internet streaming through websites like Márgenes and PLAT, devoted to experimental Spanish film) impose their own forms of fragmentation and are helping shape up new experimental practices in Spain. Far from a nostalgic cinephilia that laments the disappearance of the cinematic experience, these films celebrate the ubiquitous presence of the moving image as well as the memory of cinematic medium, and thereby take cinephilia forward into the future.

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Ya viene, aguanta, riéguese, mátame (Los Hijos, 2009)

¹ Prominent examples include the edited collections *Movie Mutations. The Changing Face of World Cinephilia* (2003), *Cinephilia. Movies, Love and Memory* (2005), the two-volume work *Cinephilia in the Age of Digital Reproduction* (2009 and 2012), and the special dossiers published by journals *Framework* in 2009 and *Cinema Journal* in 2010. The debates about the new cinephilia also cross over to more polemical forms of film criticism; see, for example Jonathan Rosenbaum's opening essay in his collection *Goodbye Cinema, Hello Cinephilia. Film Culture in Transition* (2010).

² I am borrowing this phrase from Erika Balsom, who employs it in relation to the cult value increasingly attached to 16 mm film as a disappearing medium, almost a relic from another age (18)—an argument that also has validity with regard to *Tren de sombras*'s veneration of early film.

³ *Tren de sombras* is a key film in the crystallisation of the academic discourse around the essay film in Spain. Guerin's film is discussed in an early issue on fake documentary and the found footage film published in *Archivos de la Filmoteca* (see Losilla 1998) and as an example of metacinematic reflection (Català Domènech 86). It has subsequently been revisited as a "limit-film" in a longer tradition of self-reflexive cinema in Castro de Paz and Cerdán's pioneering investigation on the origins and evolution of the essayistic film form in Spain. In a detailed analysis of *Tren de sombras* David Montero explicitly links Guerin's works to a European tradition of essay films (68-73).

⁴ For an early attempt at categorization, see Lopate. Catalá, Corrigan and Rascaroli offer detailed studies of the formal characteristics and rhetorical strategies of the essay film.

⁵ This affiliation has been articulated in explicit dialogues: Guerin and Mekas have participated in a joint initiative fostered by the CCCB (Centre de Cultura Contemporànea de Barcelona): a collection of video-letters gathered in *Correspondence: Jonas Mekas-J. L. Guerin (Work in Progress)*, a joint piece designed for museum exhibition, as well as circulation in the film festival circuit and via DVD (as part of the omnibus project *Todas las cartas: Correspondencias fílmicas/The Complete Letters: Filmed Correspondence*, 2011). Isaki Lacuesta has repeatedly addressed Chris Marker's legacy in his own multimedia practice, as well as paying tribute to Marker in writing (see Lacuesta on Marker in *Caimán. Cuadernos de Cine* published in May 2012, no 5 (56), 20-21).

⁶ For example, Ehrlich refers to films by Mercedes Álvarez, Guerin and Lacuesta as examples of a “contemporary alternative cinema” (2008, no page). The specialist Spanish magazine *Caimán. Cuadernos de Cine* (formerly known as *Cahiers du Cinéma España*) has promoted the idea of Spain’s “other” cinema (i.e. in the margins of the mainstream) through its support of the work of Guerin and Lacuesta, alongside other independent filmmakers such as Álvarez, Albert Serra, Marc Recha, Jaime Rosales, Lluís Galter and Javier Rebollo. See for example Carlos F. Heredero, “Hacia una nueva identidad” in *Cahiers du Cinéma España* 27 (October 2009), 6-8; Carlos Losilla, “El gesto” in an issue entitled “Cine Español. Gestos de Rebeldía,” 37 (September 2010), 6-7, as well as an issue focusing on Isaki Lacuesta, *Cahiers du Cinéma España* 28 (November 2009), 6-23.

⁷ The film’s literal title, “The Night that Never Ends,” was changed to *All the Night Long* for international circulation.

⁸ For a full account of this argument, see Sánchez-Biosca (65-84).

⁹ I have written elsewhere about cinephilia and the popular retro film. For an extended analysis of this question, see Vidal.

¹⁰ Throughout this article I use “cinephilic” as the most common form in lieu of the less widely used “cinephiliac.” However, the historiographical reflection that underpins Keathley’s preference for the latter adjective is key to the reflexive cinephilia embedded in film history which, I contend, characterises Guerin’s and Lacuesta’s artistic practice.

¹¹ “Little white clouds drifted behind Notre-Dame in an old film by Jean Renoir. And I say to myself, thus those little clouds drifted by, more than fifty years ago.” (*Souvenir*, Silvia Gracia and José Luis Guerin). My translation.

¹² Guerin himself has elaborated on this connection. See interview with Guerin and producer Lluís Miñarro conducted by Àlex Gorina on the television programme *Sala 33* (Canal 33, broadcast on 9 May 2009). Available at: <http://www.tv3.cat/videos/1211409/A-la-ciutat-de-Sylvia>. Accessed August 1, 2013.

¹³ In a different take on *La leyenda del tiempo*'s cinephilic connections, Cerdán (229, 248-249) points out that this section of the film references *Mystery Train* (Jim Jarmusch, 1989), and in particular the episode "Far from Yokohama," in which a Japanese couple arrives in Memphis to visit the memory sites of 50s rock music. Cerdán establishes a parallel between this postmodern take on myth and cultural displacement and Makiko's journey to Southern Spain in search of Camarón.

¹⁴ The division into chapters not only reflects the headings that divide the film into clearly differentiated sections (the film is, in fact, a collection of seven mini-essay films) but highlights the adequateness of this structure to the digital technology that mediates the work. In the DVD edition of the film, each of the seven essays corresponds with a DVD chapter through which the piece may be easily sampled, as well as consumed in its entirety. Sections/chapters work in a non-linear way, as pieces of a kaleidoscopic composition.

¹⁵ "Cameras are strictly forbidden" (my translation).

¹⁶ "Time is, for Chris Marker, [the] spiral of infinite variations in which echoes and premonitions blend" (my translation).

¹⁷ Tellingly, Lacuesta's film is based on the *footnotes* from Marcos Ordóñez's account of Gardner's Spanish years *Beberse la vida: Ava Gardner en España* (2004)

¹⁸ "The other story;" "the story of the filmed bodies" (my translation).

¹⁹ "Probably the least *flamenco*-inclined town in Catalonia" (my translation).